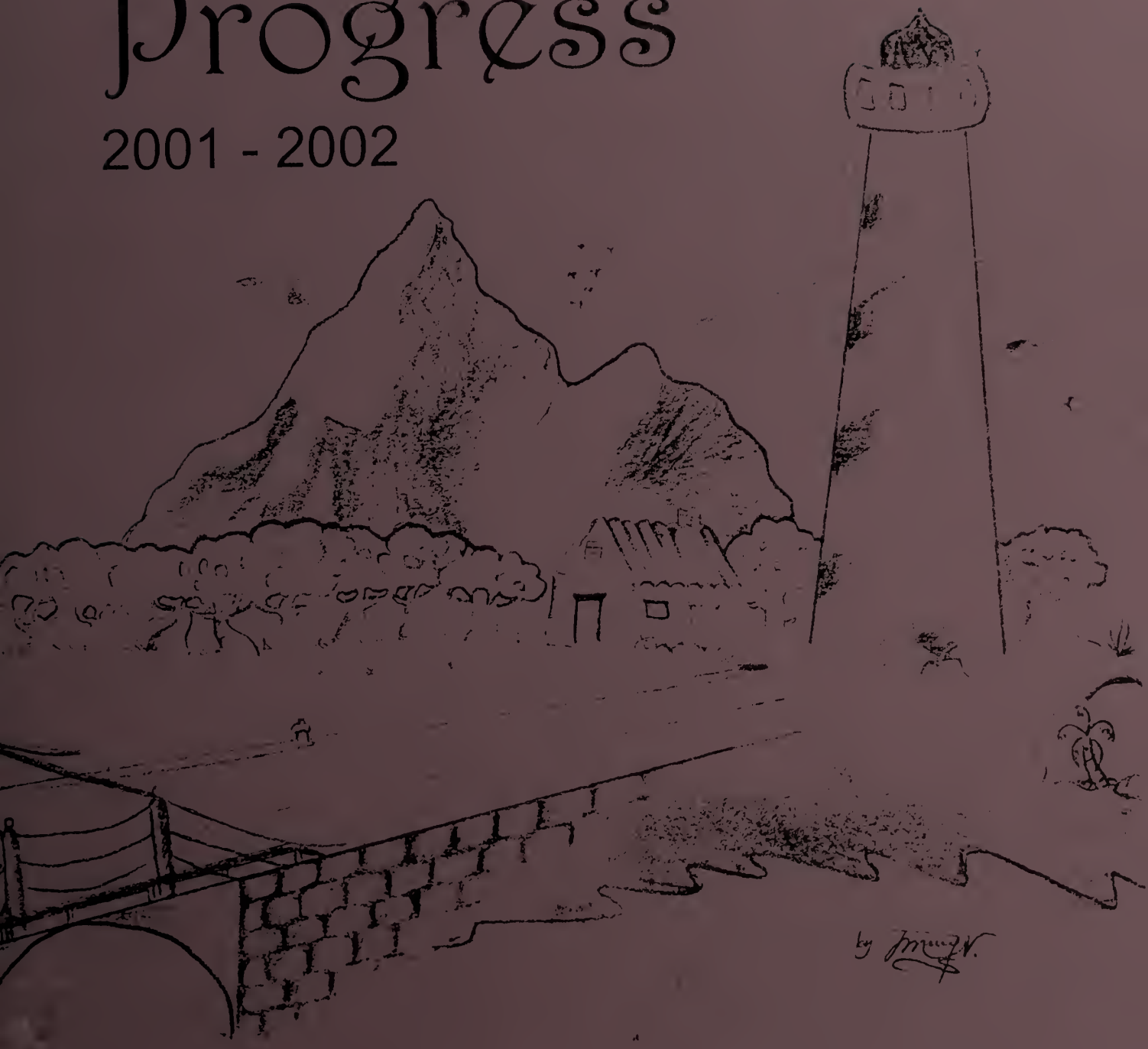
Writers In Progress

2001 - 2002



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Juan M. Villa is this year's cover artist. He is 20 years old and was a student in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2002. He is a computer science major at NECC. When he is not in school, Juan enjoys drawing and playing sports.

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Dedication

To all the students who think they can't,
and all the students who discover they can.

Because of the large number of submissions we receive each year, we are faced with the difficult task of choosing which papers to publish. Space limitations prevent us from printing every paper we receive. We apologize because we believe that every writer who has had the courage and pride to offer his or her work for publication deserves recognition. This issue is dedicated to all of you.

We honor submissions from:

- Andres Agudelo
- Graziela Azimzadeh
- Eric Barberio
- Natalie Becotte
- Melanie Bohanan
- Mark Burton
- Marjorie Cabrera
- Juanita Candelario
- Jescenia Castillo
- Imelda Cata
- Mike Chandler
- Eric Y. Cora
- Ariel Cuevas
- Pat DeMonaco
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- Rosaira Reynoso
- Brooke Rickard
- Angela Robinson
- Susan Roche
- Luis Rosario
- Victor Ruiz
- Sandra Sánchez
- Richard Spero
- Jeff Standley
- Moraima Taveras-Feliz
- Teti Thornton
- Tanya Valadares
- Mercedes Valdez
- Carlos Valle
- Juliana C. Veloso
- Lien Vo
- Tony Vu
- Kim M. Whalen
- Ying

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Introduction

To make progress, a writer must take risks. For Basic Writing students, the most important risk is trusting the writing process. When students are unfamiliar with the process, the early weeks of the course are a little like those team-building exercises where you force yourself to fall backward, relying on someone else to catch you.

Many student writers have relied on a writing process that consists of reading the question or assignment, putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, and stopping when they run out of words. This is actually a good beginning, or what writing teachers call a prewriting. It takes courage to see this stage as **only** the beginning; the risk that the students take is that they will see flaws if they look at the prewriting closely. Acknowledging these flaws means fixing them; fixing them takes time. Now the writers are immersed in the writing process.

Once student writers have a prewriting that works, their next step is a draft. Drafts need to grow, and development is also risky. It may require skills that the students haven't used before or haven't practiced recently: paragraphing, transitions, examples, anecdotes, dialogue. While practicing these skills may result in new errors, each skill also contains the possibility of discovery, for both writers and readers.

At the end of the draft stage, most student writers feel that the work is done. In Basic Writing, this is the point at which most writers conference with a tutor. The writing process doesn't get any scarier than this, because now the draft has its first reader, and the writer often sees his or her work through someone else's eyes for the first time. This is what Donald M. Murray calls re-vision, seeing the work again. Revision requires that the writers see what they have written, not what they think they have written, and that they address any problems the draft has for the reader. Now the risk is in the changes the writer makes to improve the draft.

What justifies this risk-taking, the anxiety and dangers of writing, is the result. When Basic Writing students trust the process, they often create essays of personality and power, essays like those in this issue of *Writers in Progress*. The writers represented here have forced themselves to fall backward, to trust themselves, their writing process, and their teachers. Their essays are the evidence of their progress.

Lynne Nadeau
May 2002

A Pleasant Visit to Beaver Lake
by Candice Silva

As I begin my visit some odd miles from my house, there is a lake that all Derry, NH, residents visit often in the summer. They come to this lake because it's a scenic, enjoyable, pleasant place to cool off, and have fun in the yellow sun. I come to this lake because it's where I relax, relieve stress, and have fun. This place is special to me because it is where I grew all through my childhood in the summer and because I was always there with my family and friends.

As I walk down the wooden sandy steps, I feel the warmth of the summer breeze. As I walk closer toward the beach, I feel the hot blazing sun hitting on my face. I see the baby blue sky and passing stratus clouds making their way across the sky. When I am walking on the soft golden sand, it feels sensationally hot between my toes. As the wind blows, I smell the freshness of the clean crisp air blowing onto my face. When the wind blows the green leaves of the trees drift side to side with the direction of the wind. I hear from a distance the sounds of children laughing, screaming, and running in and out of the water.

As I walk along the beach, I see children digging with their different color plastic shovels and pails. Children are building structures of sandcastles of all different shapes and sizes. I feel the rays hitting my body as sweat builds up on my skin. People are sun tanning and I see sweat and oil pouring off their bodies. The breeze blows by my nose the sweet fragrance of suntan lotion, as people are rubbing it onto their bodies. People's radios are playing beats from rap, dance, hip-hop, classical, and rock.

There are a few small, light colored lake cottages that surround the lake. Some cottages are pure white, baby blue, and brownie brown. I see American flags blowing with the wind. As I approach the clear water, waves are crashing onto the beach. Children are swimming and diving into the water off the wooden shaky floating platform. On that platform there is a slippery blue water slide where children are sliding down with fear on their faces. As soon as they hit the water they make a big splash. Parents and children are laughing and having a great time just like they were at Disney World.

I see red, white, and blue sailboats of all different sizes drifting along with the wind. Boaters from a distance are fishing and cooking their skin in the hot blistering sun. I see jet skiers making their way across the lake. I hear boaters saying "hi" to other

boaters when their boats drift by each other. As I go deeper into the water I get chills up my spine from the coldness of the water and goose bumps appear suddenly all over my body in a matter of seconds.

When I make my way out of the water I see children to the left of me skipping rocks across the lake. I see a lifeguard sitting on her lifeguard chair with blond hair, tan skin, and wearing a red one-piece bathing suit. As I hear a whistle blow the lifeguard sees a small boy over his head struggling to stay up. The lifeguard dives into the water to help the boy. The lifeguard helps the boy out of the deep water and safe onto the shore.

All of a sudden I hear an exciting song; it is the ice cream truck song. All of the children scurry out of the water and off the beach to get their favorite dessert. I see the children's mouth-watering faces staring at my fudgsicle. When I come back onto the beach my ice cream begins to start melting down my Popsicle stick. I can taste the sweet dark chocolate melting in my mouth. When people open their coolers I can smell ham and cheese sandwiches and salty chips.

As it gets later people pack up their belongings and head home. As time goes by I see the dying sun setting over the horizon. The vibrant colors begin to change in a breathtaking sequence from different shades of yellow, orange, red and pink. The reflection of the colors starts to appear on the crystal clear water. Neighbors start to cook on their grills for dinner. The stench smell of charcoal and burned cheeseburgers, crispy barbecue chicken, and hotdogs engulfs the air with a warm tingling feeling. I start to feel the air getting cooler so I pack my belongings and head home to eat dinner.

When I leave this place I feel so energized, relaxed, and ready to begin another day. This makes me want to go to the lake more often every day. The lake is a place where if I were having a bad day I would go there and try to not think of what had happened that was bothering me. This is a place where you can catch up on reading your favorite novel, or see the sun setting with someone you love. I love to come to this place because it reminds me of the great times with my friends and family.

Candice is 19 years old and lives in Atkinson, NH. She is a respiratory care major at NECC. In the fall of 2001, she took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course. After completing the course, Candice says, "I feel much better that I took this class. It gave me the skills that I need to go into Comp. I."

Funeral Home Tour
by Tim Johnson

As I entered the dark parking lot there was a silence that only the imagination could hear, a silence of death. When I parked the car in the only spot left, it was in the far left hand corner near the woods that outlined the parking lot. I got out of my car and heard a faint cry that you could only hear if you really listened hard, almost like hearing a puppy cry for its mother. It was a woman crying on a man's shoulder outside the front door of the Douglas & Johnson Funeral Home in Salem, NH.

I started to walk towards the door and the recently faint cries got louder with every footstep I took. The front of the building was white with black shutters, giving it the appearance of a house; neatly trimmed bushes and green grass gave me the feeling of happiness surrounding the door. I finally came close to the beige double doors that had brightly finished handles on them; the handles looked as if someone had polished them. There was a group of people who were talking and smoking right in the front of the double-door entrance to the building, people I didn't know. As I went to enter through the right hand door it suddenly swung open almost like it knew I was about to enter. The door didn't swing open by itself; there was a man that opened it for all the mourners that had come to mourn the loss of my grandmother. The man grabbed my hand and shook repeatedly with force and said, "I'm sorry." It was not until then that it struck me that I was at my grandmother's wake.

I proceeded into the lobby; the lobby was finished in off white paint, even the ceiling, and a rug that even with shoes on I could feel the cushion of. In the left hand corner of the lobby was a book for you to sign to show you were there and that you were sorry for the loss to the family. I was like the 50th one to sign the book. I felt as though I was signing a yearbook or something. I was then directed to my relatives by a young man dressed in all black that stood next to the book.

I then proceeded down a little hallway that was as quiet as a library, passing many people who are my relatives and people I didn't know. The walls were covered with bright peach colored paint and the rug was an off white color, which was visibly covered in dirt. Walking down the hallway felt as though I was walking towards heaven, as if I was following a bright light.

Near the end of the hallway on the right side I noticed a room full of people who were not relatives to me. The room was only big enough for ten or fifteen people or so. I then took a couple of more steps down the hall and noticed another entrance to the building on my left, one that is hidden to the outside. There was the same setup that I went through: the signing of the book, the doorman who assisted people with the door and their coats. Everyone was dressed in black or dark colors; it was as if dark colors were the only colors the stores had. The men were all in suits and the women had on long dresses and the little kids had on whatever they wanted to wear. As I neared the end of the hallway a strong smell came upon me, a smell of death; it was as if I had entered heaven myself. The air seemed to get thicker and harder to suck in as I neared the wake room with an increasingly strong smell of flowers.

I entered the wake room barely breathing because I had been dreading this day, seeing everybody sad and down because of a loss. When I took my first step into the room I noticed that there was a beautiful variety of flowers near my grandmother's

casket. All the red, blue, yellow and white flowers made the oak casket stick out and look pretty. The air was thick with sadness and a smell of a florist.

There was some soft music playing that sounded good in the dimly lit room and even people talking, but what caught my eye was the rug. The rug was a white color that was brought out by the off white walls and the overwhelming amount of colorful flowers near the casket. Then I heard, "Tim, over here." It was my mom and dad; they had saved a seat for me in the first row because that was the row for the family. When I sat down I felt as though I was sitting on a cloud because the chair was nice and soft. I felt at ease because I was with my family and I got to see my grandmother. While sitting in my seat I noticed a line that extended through the middle of the room to the casket; it was all the mourners that had come to say their good-byes to my grandmother. The line was full of people with tears in their eyes and some people were holding hands.

I sat in my seat waiting for my turn to go up to say goodbye to my grandmother. Sitting there made me realize that death isn't a bad thing and saying goodbye isn't hard either, but what is hard is knowing you will never see that person again.

Tim is 19 years old and lives in Salem, NH. He is a business major at NECC, and someday, he hopes to be a small business owner. In the fall of 2001, he took Ginger Hurajt's Basic Writing course. After completing Ginger's course, Tim says, "I feel confident that I can write papers fully. Basic Writing really helped me define my writing skills."

A Peaceful Place
by Zahida Abbasi

The most wonderful place, which I like to visit again and again, is my mother's house garden in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Chittagong is my birthplace. The garden has so many memories of my childhood as I grew up living beside this beautiful garden. I have worked in the garden every day. It has given me so much pleasure and satisfaction before and still keeps giving me comfort and joy that nothing else in the world can give. The bond between the garden and myself has kept growing for many years.

The garden is divided into two parts, the front and the back. In the middle, there is a small fountain where my sister and I used to play in the summertime. Many different birds come to this white fountain for a drink or for a splash in the cold water. The fountain is surrounded by soft green grass, which seems like a white flower covered with dew on a frosty morning. Walking on the green lawn barefoot is like you are walking on a soft rug.

Different kinds of flowers are planted in the front and at the entrance of the garden. It gives me such joy to see a variety of colorful flowers in full bloom in the spring. Since I was a child I loved to work in the garden. My mother and I used to make beautiful arrangements, sometimes just to decorate the house or to give as a present to family and friends. The people would love to get and enjoy the freshness of the flowers all the time. Among many kinds of flowers, those most attractive to me are tulips and roses for their bright colors. Seeing sunflowers standing in a row and smiling at the sun is really fascinating. Color and smell of flowers attract many colorful birds and butterflies. Roses, daffodils, marigolds, and many other flowers appear to be waving at you when the light breeze blows over them. It has turned into such a peaceful and cheerful place, which is hard to find anywhere.

The daytime at the garden is remarkable and the night is full of the sweet smell of flowers. The garden is always full of sounds; sometimes birds are tweeting or bees are humming from flowers to flowers. It seems like nature has its own musical band.

On the backside of the garden there is a special place where you will see all the seasonal vegetables. The whole family always enjoys the taste of the fresh vegetables. The garden brings the whole family together on the weekends and holidays to work and make it as wonderful as it should be. Evening teas under the shade of the trees and sweet flowers' smell is really unforgettable. A natural touch and feeling of nature is always present there.

Relaxing on the hammock under the tall coconut trees and drinking the sweet juice of coconuts are probably the best part of the garden. On stormy nights, tall trees

dancing along the wind is a real eye catcher. The sweet smell of soil on rainy days or just sitting in the moonlit night is so amazing that it makes you feel like you are in heaven.

The garden itself is not big, but nature's beauty and purity is so strong that words cannot describe. Whenever I feel lonely or depressed, I visit the garden and just sit there. I feel so much peace and happiness just by sitting under the tall trees and being surrounded by nature's so many true colors. If someone wants to enjoy the beauty of nature I definitely recommend them to spend some time in the garden to get the same satisfaction and happiness as I do. Whenever I visit the garden, it takes me back to my golden days of childhood. The garden seems like my old buddy, where all my good and bad things and my secrets have been locked. I grew up with this wonderful garden and its memories will definitely live with me forever.

Zahida is originally from Bangladesh. Now that she is here in America, she plans to earn a degree in graphic design and desktop publishing from NECC. She was a student in Caroline Anderberg's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2002. After taking Caroline's class, Zahida feels more secure about her writing. She says of her accomplishments in Basic Writing, "My improvement is also noticed by my family which really made me proud."

The Leader of Courage
by Mary-Ellen Briggs

I was at the age of twenty-nine when I watched my grandfather take his last breath. His life, as I knew it, started flashing before me. I thought, "What a strong and courageous man he was." My vivid memory of him began when I was at the age of ten.

My mom called him dad. To me he was my Nano. He was born in Italy on June 20, 1906. He was a veteran of World War II. He made his living as a barber in Lawrence, MA. Fortunatus was his name and it means man of fortune; Fotch was his nickname.

His tall, large frame of 5'11" carried him with the look of respect. He always wore dress shirts and slacks. The shirt had to have a pocket for his pen, pencil and a pack of Camel cigarettes. His big brown eyes expressed exactly what he was feeling; he had a gold front tooth that sparkled when he smiled. This caused a stern businessman to melt into my Nano.

I always knew where to find my grandfather. He was at his barbershop working. I used to love to go there. My aunt and I would go help close the shop for the night. When we pulled up in front of the large store front windows, Nano would look out, give us a big smile and wave. The day's hair cuttings were everywhere. My job was to sweep the floor. I was Nano's little helper.

Being a barber in the community made him well known. He was a righteous man with strong convictions. His opinion was respected. Here is an example. Everyday he went to the butcher that he always patronized; he would buy his daily items for tomorrow night's meal. The store carried the local bakery's bread. Nano always bought a stick. One day he yelled across the counter to the butcher, "Hey Benny, why have you raised the price of bread?"

The butcher replied, "My taxes went up."

Nano went berserk on him, "That's a lot of bull. I'm a business owner too! They didn't go up. You're a crook. I will not be coming here anymore."

At the end of the month, I am sure the butcher had a good amount of loss, especially after Nano talked with his friends.

Nano had compassion for people less fortunate than himself. He would help anyone he could. At times it would inconvenience family members. He would say, "What do you want me to do? They are in need." But if the help he provided was not really needed and he was being taken advantage of, he wouldn't be so quick to help them

again. My grandfather believed that respect and hard work carried all the weight one needed to live a healthy productive life, even if life threw you a curve.

I remember this one particular time. I was eleven and there was such a commotion going on. I was at the sidelines, so to speak. Nano was in bed for a few days and was not getting any better. The doctor was with my grandfather. I remember hearing my mom say, "He is never sick. This isn't good." Well, it was not good. The ambulance came and took Nano away! Days later my mom had informed me, "Your grandfather is very sick with some kind of virus. We don't know if he will make it. He has gone into a coma."

Time had passed. It was a year before I saw Nano again. We were all going to the Veteran's Hospital in Boston to see him. I was scared. I had been told he had lost the use of his legs and he needed to be in a wheelchair. I didn't know how to react. The situation seemed so strange to me. A few months later he was coming home; therefore, many preparations needed to be made. The doctors said he would never walk again. Nano didn't believe them.

As I watched this man recover the best he could, I was in awe! He had an attitude that was so positive. Was it because he knew he had to be an example for the people around him? I don't know, but I'm glad he was for me.

He exercised to strengthen his upper body and legs. He soon started walking with crutches. He lived on the second floor of the house he owned. He worked real hard so that he could go up and down the stairs. His desire was to do as much as possible by himself. Going outside was one of his goals. Through my eyes, nothing would stop this man. No matter how much pain he had to endure he kept on trying. He made it down the stairs and up again. Once he mastered the stairs he was going out everyday. He would walk to the store, to the club, around the yard to see what needed to be done, get the mail and go upstairs for lunch. Months had passed and he started getting bored. He was ready to move on.

He bought an attachment for his car. This enabled him to use his hand to control the brakes and gas pedals. He became the family taxi. Schools, doctors, the market, you name it, he taxied. The accomplishments made him feel independently free again. He started cutting hair at home for his family and friends. This provided self-worth in his new way of living.

Despite the fact of his own adjustments, he still maintained a sense of strength and control. This one incident, my parents had gone out for the evening. We decided to have a party against their orders. Nano was so mad at my sisters and me. He came down the stairs because he heard us being real loud. He pushed the door open. "What is going on in here?" he shouted. Everyone became so quiet. "I want everybody out. Now!" he shouted again. We were all shocked when he waved the bottom of his crutch in our direction. Our friends were walking out the door and no one had the nerve to say anything, for when Nano said something we listened.

He couldn't do a lot of things he used to do, but I was there. He became my instructor. One day he wanted dandelion greens over Italian toast. "Mary-Ellen, I have something we can do." I was always ready to help. He instructed me to get the tools we needed and off to the banks of the river we went. Nano told me how to dig up the greens. "Remember they can't have flowers," he said. He enjoyed his lunch very much and I was

glad to see him happy. He was real proud of me and always let me know it. "A good job," he would say.

It has been seventeen years since that last breath and there is not a day that goes by I don't reflect on the powerful impact he has had on my life. He has shown me that no matter how tough things can get never give up. I hope I can give this gift to my niece and grandchildren too!

This man is the very healthy structure that exists in my life today. I feel his influence has shown me the good things in life. Without this structure, I would never care to move on to better things. All my love to you, Nano!

Mary-Ellen, 45, likes to fish, bowl and spend time with her grandsons. Her goal is to be a writer and public speaker. Mary-Ellen took Jackie Peña's spring 2002 Basic Writing class, which has given her "a positive feeling" that she can write.

My Hero!
by Erica Provencher

I sit on the porch, sort of hidden from the window so my father doesn't see me watching him while he works in the backyard. My father works very intensely while he is chopping firewood. It's almost as if everything else in the world is forgotten except for what he is concentrating on. He always wears these silly headphones on his head and taps to the beat of his music while he works. Every now and then I catch him dancing but he would never admit that one!

My father is a very rugged man with a scruffy mustache, and when I was younger he would tickle me with his mustache every time he kissed me. His hands are big with calluses all over them from working hard his whole life. He stands about 6' tall and has a very calming look to him. I always feel safe and secure whenever he is around.

Working is all he ever does all day long. He never stops! In order to give him a rest or a day off my mother has to take him on a mini-vacation up to the mountains away from civilization.

My father has been an Amesbury firefighter for about 30 years, a hero in my eyes! The situations he faces on a day-to-day basis I could never comprehend dealing with, like pulling dead bodies out of car crashes by using the jaws of life, or seeing his best friend get sucked up by concrete and suffocate to death, or babies all bloody and mangled from being thrown about five feet from a crash. I just don't know how he deals with all this tragedy all day long and can still come home with a big smile and joking words when he sees me.

My father's a great guy. He will help anyone and anything that may be in harm. One morning on my dad's way home from work he brought home a baby mallard duck, whose wing was broken and unable to fly home. I remember watching my father wrap the duck's wing with bandages so carefully and gently that the duck did not even flinch. We took care of the duck, fed him and gave him shelter until he could fly away again. Even animals can understand to trust my father because they know as well as humans that he is only trying to help. I think to myself, "Wow, I am really, really lucky to have a father who can do anything because he is never afraid."

My father is very popular with everyone in town and beyond because he has been to many people's houses for something at one point in time, whether they need my father to fight a brush fire or stop someone from having a heart attack. He's sort of like Santa Clause, only instead of bringing an actual present, his presence is all they need.

People come up to me sometimes and ask if I ever get scared because of my father being on the Fire Department. I just tell them that if my father were to die in the line-of-duty, then it is for something that he believed in, and, of course, I will be sad, but at least I will know that he is happy, dying for what he believed in.

My father has taught me to always do your best and to work hard at everything. There was a time when I pretty much wanted to give up on life. I thought there was nothing in the world for me and then my father said, "Only the weak give up and you're

not weak because I have seen what you can accomplish!" After he said some words of advice, I remembered who I am as a person and reinvented my life as well as my outlook. My father very rarely gets upset at anyone, unless you never try to succeed. Talking to my dad is easy and he will always try to see everyone's point of view, even if he does not believe in what you are saying.

My father's favorite thing to do when he has time is watching *The Three Stooges* on television or going for walks in the woods. In ten years from now he is never going to change. My father will always be rescuing people from harm and chopping firewood in the backyard. My father has a purpose in life and responsibilities to meet everyday; I think that is what keeps him going on strong. He says, "Once you stop working, that is when you die, so never give up!"

Erica is 22 years old and works at Applebee's as a kitchen manager. She is interested in a career as a dental hygienist or massage therapist. Because Erica received such great encouragement in Carol Barron's fall 2001 Basic Writing class, she now tries harder at writing and enjoys it more.

My Loving Husband
by Gloria Graham

The love of my life is the man I've come to know deeply. When I look at him I see strength, honesty, and courage. This man is my husband, and I'm very proud of him. I can see Estavon clearly with his Fubu jeans, and his Fubu shirt, or in a classy business suit. He has the biggest chocolate brown eyes I have ever seen. He has short black hair that's soft to touch. Sometimes he cuts his hair off bald. I think he looks even sexier that way. He stands 5'8" tall with muscles that make The Rock look bad. His lips are luscious; they look like they're in the form of a perfect kiss.

Most of the time you could find him at home sitting on the couch watching sports such as basketball, or football, or what I know is his favorite sport, wrestling. He thinks The Rock is the greatest thing since baked bread. He's pretty calm when he's watching sports, but when wrestling is on you would think he's either at ringside, or in the squared ring wrestling with the tough guys. You can sometimes find him yelling and jumping up and down like a maniac in front of the TV. The faces he makes when someone gets body slammed just make me laugh. One face he makes looks like a mad man; another face he makes looks like Bozo the Clown, as if he is in disbelief that the tough guy is losing. Estavon swings his arms rapidly like he can help the wrestlers on TV fight.

When we're out in public he comes off as a very quiet person. He seems very serious, but when you get to know him you soon realize what a big teddy bear he is. He can be a very funny person who's always trying to make people laugh. I find when I'm upset he always seems to know how to make me happy. I can picture him dancing around the house trying to get my attention. When I first met him I thought he had two left feet. When we go out dancing he looks over at me and says, "Slow down so I can learn that move you're doing." Over the years he has become a good dancer. I like to take credit for that.

My husband has a very positive attitude about life. Things that are small and unimportant he does not stress out about. Like when I ask him for help using the computer he usually says, "Just try. You can't break it."

I say, "Oh yes I can."

He says, "If you break the computer it can be fixed."

There is a friendly way about him. I can't think of anyone he doesn't get along with, and I'm treated like a queen even when I know I don't deserve to be. My family

and friends think of him as a very caring man. It seems that whenever a family member or friend needs someone to confide in they go straight to Estavon. They sometimes tell me I don't know how good I have it. I try to thank God every chance I get. I feel like I know him very well; sometimes when we talk I can look into his eyes and almost predict what he's going to say or what he's thinking. Usually, it's something uplifting.

I remember when we first met I didn't think much of myself. At times, I still don't. He always manages to show me how special I am, and that my life is meaningful. When we talk, I sometimes put myself down, and he tells me not to do that. I can see my husband ten maybe five years from now running his own business, doing whatever his dream is, and being successful at it too, and in those same years I'll be right along side of him equally successful because we've grown together as a couple, as a team. Through the years he has taught me strength, honesty and courage. I know it's because of him I am a better person. I've learned through his strength that no matter what I set out to accomplish or what goals I have, anything can be achieved with a positive attitude and courage.

Gloria, 35, is planning a career in human services and lives in Haverhill, MA. Before she took Paula Richards's Basic Writing class in spring 2002, she "had no interest in writing." Now Gloria says, "I love writing. I never thought I would feel this way."

In Just Seconds
by Federico Gabin

It was October 16, 1999 and I was 22 years old. It was your typical fall day with leaves flying all over the place and a nice cool breeze. I was at my mother's house looking out the window procrastinating about where I was going to watch the boxing match between Oscar de la Hoya and Felix "Tito" Trinidad. This boxing match had been long awaited by all boxing fans. The fight between these two opponents was not only the money involved but pride between two countries. Who would ever know that the day these two great opponents faced off it was going to be a turning point of my life for the better?

While I was looking out the window I heard the phone. I ran across the living room to answer the phone. It was my friend Vigilio. I said, "Hi, how are you doing?"

He answered, "Good and you?"

"I'm doing alright," I said. "So where are you going to watch the fight?"

He replied, "That's why I'm calling you to see if you want to go see it at my friend's house."

I answered, "Who is going with us?"

He replied, "Just you, Miguel and I."

I then said, "Alright come by later and let me take a shower and get dressed."

"Ok," he said.

Vigilio is a short stocky kid with brown short hair and brown eyes. He came by later on that day to pick me up. I heard the horn of the car. I looked out the window to see if it was Vigilio's white Mazda. I got up from the couch putting my blue jacket on. I headed towards the door while asking my mom for her blessings. I ran down the stairs and into the car. Vigilio said, "We need to pick up Miguel."

I said, "Ok let's go."

We then picked up Miguel. The next thing we did was go to Vigilio's friend's house where we were going to watch the fight. We were very excited about the fight. I was moving around the car seat because I couldn't stay still just thinking about the match. Vigilio said, "Ok guys this is where my friend lives."

My friends and I got out the car. Miguel and I followed Vigilio into his friend's house. The moment we got inside Vigilio's friend Marcos's house, he said, "Welcome, make yourself at home."

I said, "Thank you. It is my pleasure."

He then replied, "You can have a seat anywhere."

Vigilio then asked us, "Would you guys like a beer?"

We responded, "Heck yeah." He came back with the beers and I opened mine. We started drinking very heavily. We drank approximately three cases of beer within a two hour period. The person that caught my eyes was my friend Miguel. I turned to Miguel asking him, "Are you alright?"

Vigilio overheard what I said and replied, "He's alright. I have seen him worse."

I then asked Miguel again, "You alright?"

Miguel said, "I'm alright. I'm chillin."

The fight then came on. Vigilio, Miguel and I were up from our seats talking loud and cheering on each other's favorite boxer. I asked Miguel, "How much do you want to bet that Oscar is going to win?"

Miguel said, "Five dollars that Trinidad will win."

"Ok let's see about that," I said.

Vigilio was getting a little hostile by watching the fight and feeling the effects of the alcohol. He kept punching the walls of the house and swearing. The fight was good. The fight lasted 12 rounds. The fight was won by Trinidad. I told Vigilio, "Let's go. I want to get out of here."

He said, "Ok."

We walked towards the car and there was a car blocking our path to get out the driveway. Vigilio asked Marcos, "Whose car is that?"

He replied, "Oh that's my neighbor's."

Enraged in fury Vigilio ran upstairs to Marcos's neighbor's apartment. He got upstairs punching the neighbor's door. The neighbor, a light skinned man, came out saying, "What the hell are you doing punching my door like that?"

Vigilio said, "Come move your car you idiot. You're blocking me."

The neighbor didn't like Vigilio's tone of voice and attitude. They started to argue and they said things to each other. The cops came to the house to check what was all the commotion. Vigilio tossed his keys to Miguel saying to him, "Move my car when this idiot moves his car." Miguel then moved Vigilio's car. All of a sudden a second cruiser responded to the call that there were people arguing in the street. The cruiser parked behind Miguel. He then went around the block so that the police officer wouldn't ask him any questions. Miguel took off into the next street.

We sat around waiting for Miguel and he would not hurry up. I was concerned about Miguel. I thought he had gotten in trouble. Vigilio and I waited impatiently for about 25 minutes. These 25 minutes were agonizing. I kept pacing back and forth on the old steps of the house. I said to Vigilio, "Let's take off man."

We decided to start walking up the street and then took a left into the next street. I remember seeing a fireman's truck and a police cruiser with their lights on. I couldn't figure out what was happening until we got closer to the wreck. I saw a crowd around the mangled car. It was Vigilio's car. I asked the officer at the scene, "Where is the driver of this car?"

He responded, "Lawrence General Hospital." I ran to the hospital just to hear the most chilling words I have ever heard. Miguel had broken his neck and had to be

airlifted to a better hospital. The nurse who gave me the news was trying to keep me calm. This nurse had a sensitive look in her eyes that brought calm to my heart.

The next day I went to the hospital in Boston. I spoke to his doctor and he said that my friend wouldn't be able to make any physical movements from his neck down. My tears came rushing down my face from the sorrow and pain I had felt from the bad news. For the next couple of weeks, months and even until this day I remember seeing my friend's smile and hearing him saying to me, "I'm alright. I'm chillin." I look at life in a different way after my friend's accident. I even cherish simple things like breathing on my own. I promised to myself I would never let myself or any of my friends drink and drive ever again. This experience has taught me the dangers of alcohol. I know now never to drink and drive. Miguel is now 20 years old and he is still confined to his bed. I still visit my friend Miguel and every time I see him I can still picture him being an outgoing person. Too bad his life had to come to a tragedy in just seconds.

Federico (Freddy) is 25 years old and lives in Lawrence, MA, with his 5-year-old son, Jyrome. He is earning a certificate in computer networking here at NECC. In the fall of 2001, he took Clare Thompson's Basic Writing course. Before he took the course, he explains, "I was skeptical to join the class because I was afraid to fail." After completing the course, Freddy says, "It was a great experience. I have learned the basic fundamentals of writing."

What a Morning!
by Angeline Garcia

The radio alarm woke me up. It was 6:00 a.m. I didn't rush getting out of bed. I always like to spend ten more minutes in bed before I get in the shower. Everything was normal, like every morning, me in the kitchen making breakfast, waking the girls up, and making sure that the girls ate breakfast before I rush them out of the house to go to school. Their father always takes them to school. Before they're out the door, I will yell to the girls not to forget their hats and mittens.

"Ambar, Alex, girls don't forget your hats and mittens," I yelled.

"O.k. Mom," they replied.

"It's very cold outside."

"O.k. Mom."

That is my typical everyday morning for me, but that morning would be very different. There I was, out of the house. The street looked like a skating rink, ice, ice and more ice everywhere that I looked. That was all I could see. The night before, it had rained a lot and the temperature was freezing. Mother Nature had blessed me with ice. I don't know how I made it to my car. I was looking for my keys when I remembered that I didn't take it from the kitchen counter. "Oh my God!" Only the thought of walking back to my house through the icy sidewalk gave me a headache. I was walking again on the ice. I didn't get far when I stepped on a nice, shiny piece of ice and, boom! My big butt hit the ground. I almost started crying and then I heard a laugh behind me.

"Ha ha ha ha, look, that woman just fell." A group of school kids were laughing at me, so I started laughing too. I made it to my house. I got the keys and very carefully I walked on the iced sidewalk to my car again. I put the key in the lock, but the door was open. Somebody had stolen my car stereo, and my CD player that my husband gave me for Christmas. My CD collection was gone, my perfume, even the quarters that I had in the glove compartment. I was screaming when I remembered that I went shopping the day before. I rushed to the trunk of the car and nothing was in it. It was empty. My outfit that I had bought in the Gap for my nephew's party, the two pairs of shoes for my girls, everything was gone. I was furious and I was swearing so loud that my throat hurt at the end.

I calmed myself down. I sat in the car and started the car. That was what I thought. Nothing happened. The car didn't respond. The car was dead and I was late to work. I called my husband, and he told me to try again to start the car. I tried again and again. Nothing happened. Somebody stopped and offered me his help so I accepted in a second. That guy told me to do this and that and nothing happened. After we saw that nothing happened, he told me to open the hood of the car and I did. Surprise! The thief

had stolen the battery too! I started screaming, crying, then I was weeping. I forgot to thank the Good Samaritan that tried to help me.

I put myself together and I called a taxi. I asked the dispatcher, "How long do I have to wait for the taxi?"

"Not too long," he answered.

"Listen I'm very late to work. How long?" I asked him again.

"Five minutes lady."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Five minutes."

I called my work. I told the front desk person to tell my boss that I was running late, that I would be there in five minutes. How wrong I was. I waited. Ten, twenty minutes passed and nothing, no taxi. I called the cab again. "Listen I been waiting for more than twenty minutes. Where is my taxi?"

"Calm down lady. It will be there in any second," the dispatcher responded. I waited ten more minutes before the taxi arrived. I opened the door and told the taxi driver where I was going. "Where?" he asked.

"Hey! Can you put the volume down please?" I yelled.

"What?" he yelled back at me. He didn't have a clue of what I was saying. The music was so loud that I couldn't hear my own voice.

"This is my car and my music so if you don't like it call another taxi," the taxi driver yelled. What! How rude! I couldn't wait for another taxi. I didn't complain about the loud music and there I was sitting in the back seat of the taxi quiet as a mouse. I combed my hair and put on some lipstick. I looked at my watch; it was 9:45 a.m. I had to get to work fast, I thought. I looked outside of the car window to see if I was near my work and by my surprise the taxi was going in the opposite direction. "Hey! Where do you think you're going?"

"I have to get another passenger," he responded.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Lady you have two choices. First, stay in the cab while I get the other passenger. Second, get off my car." That was all he told me. I wanted to kill that taxi driver with my hands. He was the rudest person that I have met in my life. I decided for choice number one. He stopped in front of an old house and honked three times. The next passenger was a young girl about twenty years old not older than that. She had with her two little boys, and I thought, "This is the next victim of that maniac with a license to kill people with his rude attitude." One of the boys was sick. The girl told the maniac (the driver) that she needed to get to the hospital. "Please take me to the Holy Family Hospital."

"No, no. I have to take this one first," he told the girl. He was talking about me in that term, like if I was a sack of potatoes.

The girl insisted, "Please my baby is burning. The fever is very high." This time the girl was crying.

"Well she was here first so I'm going to take her before you," the driver said.

"Take her to the hospital first. Anyway I'm late," I said.

"O.k. but don't blame me when your boss fires you."

We got to the hospital in about five minutes. I helped the girl get out of the car and I wished her good luck. She disappeared in the emergency room. "Thank God! I

was going to get to my work," I thought. "Are you crazy?" I asked that stupid taxi driver when he didn't stop at the red light outside the hospital. I didn't finish the question when I saw the flashing light of the police car behind the taxi. That was all that I needed to make that morning more miserable than it was.

"License and registration," I heard the police officer through my window. The taxi driver handed some papers to the cop. The policeman took the papers to the officer that was inside of the car. In just two minutes the two cops were in front of the taxi.

"Step out of the car," the cop told the taxi driver.

"Why?" asked the driver.

"Why? You're driving with a suspended driver license. That is why you are being arrested."

"What about me?" I asked.

"We'll call you a taxi," one of the cops told me.

There I was, in the middle of the road waiting for another taxi to take me home. While I was waiting for the other taxi to arrive, I called my boss and told her, "I'm sorry but I'm not going to make it to work." I explained her everything that had happened to me that morning. I guess that she was sorry for me. The other taxi came. Thank God that this time it was a very polite guy. I told him my address and I was there in no time.

I went home and I made pancakes. I eat pancakes when I'm not feeling good. When I was at the table eating it, I started laughing so hard that my chest was hurting me when I finished. I didn't know what was so funny about my morning that I couldn't stop laughing.

That day I learned that when you think that you have problems, there are people with more serious problems than yours. It was very sad, when I saw that girl rushing to get her sick baby to the hospital. That experience made me realize that that morning my problems were only materialistic.

Maybe it was not my day, but this experience had taught me that I have to take this life step by step, day by day, because not every day would be the color of spring.

Angeline (Angie) is 33 years old and lives in Lawrence, MA, with her husband, Rafael, and her two daughters, Ambar, 10, and Alex, 6. She is an early childhood major at NECC. In the spring of 2002, she took Caroline Anderberg's Basic Writing course. Before she took the class, she was very scared about writing. After taking the class, Angie says, "I love it!"

Kelly's Pink Bike
by Melanie Bohanan

I grew up in a neighborhood with lots of children. We all got along pretty well except for the fact that the majority of the kids were boys. It was fun playing with them but, at times, they would get extremely rough. It didn't matter if you were a girl or not when we were playing games like kickball, red rover, or cops and robbers. They would really pound on the girls rough us up just like we were one of the boys.

The only thing we all could do rather gently was to go bike riding together. I remember the boys would put playing cards in their tire spokes so that when they rode their bikes it would make a cool clicking sound. The girls were not allowed to have cards on their tire spokes, just the boys of course. The most exciting thing we had on our bikes were colored plastic fringes that hung from the handlebars. It made the bike look so pretty.

It was a hot summer day during school vacation and my friend Kelly was coming over to go bike riding. It was great to have a girl coming to play with me. We were both about the same age of nine.

She had a brand new pink bike. It had a big banana seat, and white and pink plastic fringe hanging from the handlebars. I can remember admiring that pink bike. It was the prettiest bike I ever laid my eyes on.

Once in a while Kelly would let me take the bike for a quick ride around the yard. At times we would go double riding together but our parents would always yell at us and tell us not to ride double because it was too dangerous and we could get seriously hurt.

I live on a street that is on a steep hill with three speed bumps spread out evenly to stop people from speeding through the street. This was a favorite place for all children in the neighborhood to ride bikes because you can go really fast down the hill.

Kelly and I used to take turns riding the bike up and down the hill. We would time each other by counting in our head to see who could go down the hill the fastest in the least amount of time.

It was getting late and I could hear my mother calling me to come home. I procrastinated a little bit getting home because I wanted to get one more turn going down the hill. I asked Kelly, "Can I use your bike one last time to get home?"

She said, "No, I will give you a ride down. Just hop on the back of my bike."

Despite the fact that our parents told us not to double ride together, we did it anyway. I had to get home! Anyhow we were kids. We were invincible and would never get hurt.

There I sat on the banana seat of the pretty pink bike at the top of the hill heading down on my way home. Kelly was the driver of the bike. As we started the descent down hill I could feel the bike pick up speed. I wrapped my arms around her waist so that I would not fall off. Over the first speed bump we went. I thought for sure it would have slowed us down but I think if anything it made the bike pick up even more speed. We were giggling away having the time of our life speeding down the hill so happy as the warm air pushed back our hair and cheeks. I could feel the adrenaline rushing through my body getting goose bumps and a tingling butterfly feeling in my belly. It almost felt like the bike was going to lift from the ground and fly away.

As we sped down this great hill with no chance of turning back or slowing down, fear suddenly came over me. I had a feeling that something was not right.

Kelly screamed, "I can't stop. I'm losing control." That was not a pleasant thing to hear as we sped down the hill.

I thought to myself, "Thank God, here comes another speed bump that should hopefully slow us down." I could feel the vibration of the tires rumbling, wobbling back and forth, side to side. The handlebars were shaking as she applied great pressure to the brakes to stop us but no such luck; there was no stopping. The hope of brakes slowing us down was not an option. We were on our way to a great disaster. I was scared to death and wanted off the bike at that moment.

I can remember letting out a great scream right before we hit a small patch of sand. I knew this was the end of our ride on the pink bike. The sand patch was going to stop us. As soon as we hit the sand we both went flying over the handlebars. I landed right in the middle of the street and Kelly on the sidewalk. I looked up trying to comprehend what the heck just happened to us and noticed a car coming straight for me. In a blink of an eye I got up as fast as I could to avoid being hit. I let out a God-awful scream, "Mommy, mommy help." You would have thought I was dying.

I was rather close to my house so my mother was in ear distance of hearing me scream for her. Kelly and I started to run towards my house. I could see my mother running towards me with her arms wide open waiting for me to reach her.

My yard was fenced in with rope that my father put around it to keep the kids off of the grass. I completely forgot the rope was there and tripped right over it trying to reach my mother to rescue me. She scooped me up and brought me into the house. She sat me on her lap rocking me in the rocking chair hugging me to calm me down so that she could clean me up, and assess the damage I did to myself. I was in pain. It felt like I had torn myself apart. I had blood, scrapes and bruises from head to toe from going over the handlebars.

I said, "Mom is my mouth still there?"

She replied, "Yes, but you do have a fat lip."

I still to this day have a scar on the top of my right hand. Every once in a while I notice it and let out a little smirk remembering what I did that day.

Now when I see children double riding I always say, "You should not double ride. It is very dangerous. You could get seriously hurt." Then I will tell my experience double riding on my friend Kelly's pink bike.

If I learned anything out of this experience it would have to be that I should always listen to what my mother has to say. She is giving me advice and telling me not to do something for a reason.

"What do you think I was just wasting my breath?" is her reply at times.

I never saw much of Kelly after that day. I really don't know why, but I do know that I've never and will never double ride on a bicycle as long as I live.

Melanie is 26 years old and lives in Bradford, MA. She is enrolled in the dental assistant program at NECC. In the fall of 2001, Melanie took Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing course. After completing the course, Melanie says, "I feel more confident now with writing."

A Birthday Party I'll Never Forget
by Dayhana Del Rosario

It was my twelfth birthday and I was so happy because my father had given me the best gift of all the gifts I ever received, a trip to Puerto Rico. I was very excited because he also bought two more tickets, one for my sister and the other one for my mom since he found out that I did not want to go by myself.

Everything was perfect. We were so happy when we arrived to the Luis Munoz Marin Airport. My father was anxiously waiting for us since he had eight months without seeing us. We could see him from far because he was carrying a whole bunch of balloons and two giant teddy bears for us.

My father took us to a very popular restaurant in San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico. Its name is Las Palmas. This is the most enormous and beautiful restaurant I ever visited in my life. It has a section exclusively for birthday parties. All my family from Puerto Rico attended my party, my cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends of the family. We had a lot of fun dancing, telling jokes, sharing funny stories, and especially eating the delicious food that was served in the party.

While I was dancing, I could hear very strange sounds coming out of the dining room. People's screams were heard all over the restaurant. I looked out the window and I saw ambulances, firefighters, police officers, and a lot of people running from one side to the other. My family and I were very baffled and scared at the same time. We did not know what to do or where to go.

I remember that my grandmother anxiously asked my father, "Francisco, what's happening out there? What is the reason for all those screams?"

"I don't know what's going on mom, but calm down," he answered.

"Go and find out right now because we're not moving from this room until I know what's happening out there," said Grandma to my father. He opened the door and closed it right away.

"Let's get out of here. This place is on fire. Jump out the window everybody!" screamed my father.

"Are you sure there is a fire?" asked my uncle, while grabbing my cousin's baby.

"Yes, I can smell and see smoke!" he replied.

"Let's get mom out of here," my father said and at the same time carried her to the way out.

We all ran to the door to try to get out of the building. We were so nervous and in such a panic because we thought we were going to die. There was so much smoke that we all had to get out of the room through the window because there was a fire in the kitchen of the restaurant. People kept getting out of the restaurant and running away from it.

That place was a disaster. I cannot remember how many burned persons were taken to the hospital, but I am sure there were more than eight. There were some persons that had to be taken to the hospital too because in their hurry to get out, they got hurt with the walls, tables and chairs. Some of them fell down and people passed over them. All the neighbors were trying to help the firefighters and paramedics to take everybody out of the restaurant. Fortunately, nobody died, but there were a lot of unconscious people.

I remember that my grandmother was standing next to me and passed out. I did not know what to do and I could not even talk. My father saw her on the floor and ran to pick her up. All my cousins were screaming and calling my grandma.

"Shut up and calm down!" yelled my father.

"Is she dead?" asked one of my cousins.

"No, she's not. She's alive, but calm down please," answered my Aunt Marisol.

"Is she going to die?" I asked with tears in my eyes.

"She'll be alright. Don't cry Dayi and try to relax," said my mother crying too.

We were all nervous, especially when an ambulance took my grandmother. My uncle asked us to get in his van to take us home, but I totally refused because I wanted to go to the hospital with my father. My uncle had to carry me and get me inside of the van. I was screaming a lot and asking my uncle to take me to the hospital, but he did not.

In the moment that we got home, my father called to give us the good news. My grandma was all right. I felt so happy when he called, but I was worried still. After a few hours, my grandmother got home very weak, but she was so happy to see that all her family was safe. We started hugging each other and praying to thank God that we were all saved and that the nightmare was over.

That was the worst day of my life and the worst birthday party I ever had. I was so sad for all the people that got burned in the big fire, but at the same time, I was happy because nobody from my family did. They were all okay and my grandma was getting better.

Also a very good thing happened. Two of my cousins were enemies for almost four years and after that, they started to talk to each other again. Everybody in my family was very happy because of that. I think that everything bad has a good part and that I have to give thanks to God for everything.

I learned from that experience that the families must be united always, in good moments and in bad moments too. I could know how much I love my family and how important they are for me. I think that bad experience helped us to be more united, even though we used to live in different countries. We started to communicate more often, by talking through the phone and by letters. We also planned to visit each other more frequently during the year. In fact, we all improved our relationships after that unforgettable day.

Dayhana is 20 years old and lives in Lawrence, MA. She is a general studies major at NECC. In the spring of 2002, she took Lynne Nadeau's Basic Writing course. Before taking Lynne's class, Dayhana "hated writing." However, after completing the course, Dayhana thinks, "It's easier to write now."

A Rewarding Experience
by Karina Mejia

The first time I held an important job was when I turned nineteen years old. This was a meaningful experience for me because I got to be part of a wonderful team of people. Also I was part of people's lives, and what's more important, their health and the health of their unborn babies.

At that time I was working in an OB/GYN office taking care of pregnant and non-pregnant women. I first started working there five years ago, when my child was eight months old. I got this job by chance. I went to the office for a check-up after I had my child and noticed that the staff was short handed. They offered me a part-time job helping the Medical Assistant. As the doctor was talking to me, I could hear the secretary saying, "They keep coming in," meaning the patients. I started the following week, but I still was in disbelief I was offered this job. When I got there and saw how busy things were in this place, I understood why I was offered the job. They needed someone badly.

The initial feeling I had about this place was wow! I found a job when I wasn't even looking, and it was working with a doctor. I couldn't believe it. That was quickly gone when I saw how unbelievably busy this office was. "No wonder the poor girl is distressed," I said to myself. "I don't know how she has done all of this work by herself." She was the doctor's Medical Assistant.

When she saw me, she said, "Thank god, you are here. I need help desperately."

At that time we were seeing an endless number of patients a day. At first I was so confused I didn't know what went where. I felt like I was in everybody's way. I didn't know what to do with myself. Patients came and went for seven hours straight. I wanted to get out and run as fast as I possibly could. This is how I felt all week long. It took me about a month to finally start to get the hang of things.

At first the reasons why I took the job were simple. I had just had a child and needed to find work to support us both. Besides I was a nineteen-year-old single parent who was living with her mother and needed to help her with the expenses of the house. I had to learn how to handle an infant and a very demanding job at the same time. This was a completely new experience for me. I had to become an adult and fast. This was the very first time I had a job that required more than showing up on time. I had always been

a responsible person, but nothing prepared me for the new world that was unwrapping before eyes.

I absolutely loved this new adventure that I was beginning. I never was an outspoken person. This job required me to talk to so many people, that it didn't even give me a chance to be shy. At first I was a little nervous about that, but then I learned how to be more open and actually enjoy talking to people.

I have established two major relationships in my work place. First is the relationship I have with my patients. Second is the relationship that I had established with my co-workers. There are only five of us including the doctor, and that I like because I feel that we have a very sincere friendship. I think that it has to do with the size of the office staff. Most part of the day I spend in the lab with the patients. I see and talk to an endless number of people. I love that. I feel that my days fly by because of that. A typical day at work is to put it in simple words, "crazy." We always have work to do here, never a dull moment. There is something always happening.

Last week I had a day from hell. My son had been sick and kept me up for most of the night. The next day I had to come to work to a full schedule. You could only imagine how that went. I couldn't concentrate on what I was doing. Everything went wrong. For starters my computer shut down and I couldn't get the test results I needed for my patients, and to make matters worse the patients were already here, waiting for me. One of the patients said, "You don't look too good. Are you OK?'

I answered, "No Katherine, I'm not. This is officially one of the worse days of my life."

The fact that I couldn't get some of the reports put the doctor in a very bad mood and me in an even worse one. He was yelling at everybody in sight. I just stay out of his way when he's upset. We can't be in the same room when we are both upset. I was so glad to see that day come to an end.

But not all days are like this one. We have many rewarding days in this field of medicine. One time we actually had to do a delivery in the office. One of our patients went into labor and was moving fast. The baby had been delivered before the ambulance got a chance to get there. This was a very incredible feeling for all of us in the office.

My responsibilities are many. When the patients come in, I have to take their vital signs one by one. Then I need to determine the reason for their visit to the office and place them in an exam room equipped with the instruments needed for that particular problem. I also have to make sure patients go for their blood test according to their gestational age. I have to assist on procedures done in the office and get test results before the patient comes back for follow-up. Besides that I need to make sure patients that had abnormal test results come back. I have to answer messages from the patients. My task here includes a whole variety of things.

Most of our patients have a smooth pregnancy where everything goes according to plans and expectations. On the other hand, some of them have a very scary nine months. We have a lot of sad moments in this office. We had a patient last month, who was thirty-two weeks pregnant and came for her routine prenatal visit. When the doctor went to hear the baby's heart beat he couldn't find it. We knew right away that something was wrong. She asked me, "Is my baby OK?"

We sent her to the hospital for a non-stress test. Unfortunately she had what we call a fetal demise. This is when the baby doesn't make it and passes on.

We have some cases like that one from time to time and I just don't know how to console the patient. That is such a devastating experience, but we have had to learn to control our emotions for the patient's sake. Sometimes I can't hold back and just cry with them. I have seen so many things go wrong during a pregnancy. It makes me wonder, pregnancy is such a delicate time and most of us don't even know it. So many things can go wrong.

I get satisfaction from what I do because I have an opportunity to be part of a person's life and what's more, make a difference in their lives. Patients come to me when they have a concern, and I do my best to try to make their worries go away. I was a very lucky person to be able to help people in such a big way.

What I learned about myself from this job is that I have the ability to help others. I also learned to become a more outgoing and positive person. This environment has changed the way I think. It has made me much more compassionate and understanding of other people's needs. Also I have learned to become a serene person and what's more important, to be reliable under pressure.

Karina is 24 years old and lives in Lawrence, MA, with her husband and her five-year-old son. She was a student in Caroline Anderberg's Basic Writing class. Before taking Caroline's class, Karina didn't like writing; however, now that she's completed the course, she says, "I feel much more confident writing an essay." She plans to enter the nursing program here at NECC.

A Summer at Canobie
by Chris DiIeso

My junior year in high school was starting to get close to an end. I was sixteen years old and I had a car, but I did not have a job. I knew that if I didn't have a job by the time that summer vacation came my parents were going to be very angry and were going to give me an even harder time than usual. A couple of my good friends had worked at Canobie Lake Park in the past and were planning on going back to work there for another year. They told me that I should go to the job fair with them and try to get a job. So one Saturday morning after bowling I went to the job fair with them to fill out an application and get interviewed. When they found out who I was friends with it worked to my advantage because they were so well liked by all the bosses around there. I decided to work in the games section with my good friend Joe.

When they called me back to tell me that they wanted to hire me I was more than happy to come in whenever they wanted me to. I hadn't worked in a few months and I figured it was about time I started making some money again and besides my friends told me it was an easy job. On my first day I caught a ride over with Joe and we went up to get assigned our games. Perhaps I enjoyed that day because it was one of the first really warm days of that spring and I was basically outside the whole time, or maybe because it was such an easy job compared to what I was used to, or maybe it was that cute girl whose number I got, but whatever it was I knew it was going to be a good summer with a job like that.

Over the next couple of months I worked on the weekends because I was still going to school during the week and because the season at Canobie doesn't really get into full swing until the summer.

During this time I got the feel for what working there over the summer was going to be like. I started to get to know my bosses and co-workers better and I started to become friends with people that I worked with on a regular basis. During this time was also when I began to figure out where I would want to work and where I would not. When you work at Canobie Lake Park it's not really like having one job but like having several. You don't work at just one particular game for the whole summer; you get assigned a different game every time that you go in to work. Responsibilities at each game are basically the same. You have to tell the guests how to play the game, make change and give them a prize if they win and then mark off what prize you gave away on small charts.

The guests did try to get me to stretch the rules from time to time. One night I was at a game where the point was to bring a small metal ring around a winding piece of metal all the way to the bottom of it. It was fairly late at night when a man walked up to me and asked me what he had to do to win the prize. This game was a very difficult one so it had the largest prizes in the park. After I explained the game to the man he began trying to win it. After a few failed attempts he turned to me and asked me the question that I had heard so many times in the past, "Is this game even possible?"

"Yes," I replied. "The game is possible. I have beaten it myself."

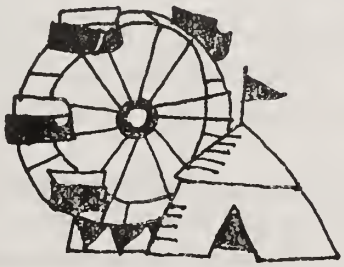
Then he began asking me if I would give him the prize even though he didn't win. "Come on, help me out man. It's for my kid," he pleaded. It made me feel somewhat bad when he started saying things like that but I still explained to him that all the games have cameras in them and I would definitely lose my job if I got caught giving things away. He eventually gave up and walked away without a prize.

Though the responsibilities at each game were basically the same there were definitely games that you would want to work at and games that you would not. Many factors contributed to what made a game good or bad. Obviously you would rather work at a game where there were other people to talk to than one where you would sit alone at and have no one to talk to for eight hours. It also wasn't as enjoyable to work at the busiest game in the park where you are constantly doing things compared to a slow game where you can just sit back and hang out with whoever you are working with.

A typical good day at work would normally involve getting assigned to the group 3 building where there are several games put together. These games collectively formed my favorite place in the park to work. I would be working with a usual group of people that I was used to working with so I would be able to spend the day talking to them. Dan and Melissa were a couple of the people that spent much of their time assigned to that group of games. At break time though we were not really supposed to accept free food from the stand I could normally get some from one of them and then go visit friends that were working at other games to make plans about what to do after work.

The job was not always fun and games though. When a day at that job was bad it could be very bad. One Saturday morning I arrived around the time the park opens at and was assigned to "water gun" also known as the busiest game in the park. On this particular 105-degree day I would be outside for eight hours straight all by myself and constantly listening to the same four random pop songs from the eighties over and over, the most annoying music that mankind had ever created. This game got constant business and it was a game where people competed against each other so there was always controversy. If someone didn't win it was obviously my fault or it was because their gun wasn't working properly and they should have their money back. I must have been yelled at in ten different languages on that day. On one occasion a woman got mad at me for telling her the rules of the game. Her and her child came up to the game and asked me if they could play it. I said, "Sorry, but you need to have at least three people to play. You can wait until more people come over." She obviously didn't understand what I had said because she then asked me if I could let just her and her child play. Once again I told her, "The game is a competition and there has to be at least three people." She then yelled at me for having a bad attitude and stormed away. I still have no idea what her problem was.

Canobie thought of itself as a community of workers so they were constantly having social events for all the employees after the park closed. They held raft races in the pool where you could form a team with all your friends and race against the other teams for a prize. They also had a Las Vegas night in the event hall where all the employees could go with fake money and gamble for prizes that would be provided by the extremely wealthy owners. They would also do things like pay for everyone to go to the movies on certain nights. All the events and the people working there did actually form a type of community where everyone was friendly with each other and everyone was always sad at the end of the season because it is something that you really got attached to. I had a very enjoyable time that summer and I probably would have gone back the next summer if I hadn't learned that I really don't like angry customers. The job had called for me to be polite and as kind and patient as I could be but some people even though they were there to have a good time just could not take it easy. That was one of the only downfalls of the job.



Chris is 18 years old and lives in Hampstead, NH. He was a student in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course. When he is not busy with schoolwork, he enjoys playing the guitar and watching Japanese cartoons.

How Lawrence District Court Changed My Life
by Sherry Twomey

On June 28, 1998, I had a hearing for a speeding ticket at Lawrence District Court. After my hearing, I went to see my girlfriend who works in the Clerks office. We were meeting for lunch. While waiting for her, I decided to fill out an application for employment in the Probation Department. I wasn't looking for a job, but I had twenty minutes until she was going to be ready for lunch.

Two months later the Chief Probation Officer George Corkery called me in for an interview. We made an appointment for the next day at nine o'clock in the morning. In the interview there were three people: Nancy Boucher, Nancy Elliot and George Corkery. The sweat was pouring down my face. I was so nervous.

Nancy Boucher placed me in a small office to take a typing test; they gave me instructions and left the room. After I finished my interview they mentioned they had others to interview and would call me in a few days. Two days passed and Mr. Corkery called me.

He said, "You have the job. We just need a date you can start."

I asked if I could give two weeks notice to my other job.

He said, "That's fine."

Starting December 3, 1998 I was a State Employee for Lawrence District Court. This to me was and still is an honor. They hired me for my bookkeeping skills because two girls were going on maternity leave and that's where I would be filling in for a few weeks.

First thing in the morning I run the records of the people that come in the Probation Department. These records come from two places, the counter where people walk in to remove warrants and when a person has been arrested or is in custody.

The probation officers fill out booking sheets which contain information on each person. These booking sheets are placed on my desk to help me run what is called a Cori. I look up their name and date of birth to see if they have a record. If they have no record I put the paperwork together and send it into the courtroom. If they have a record I see if they are on probation. If they are on probation I determine if it is supervised or unsupervised. I then find their folder and tell their probation officer whether or not it is a warrant or a new arrest.

There are several different ways we handle each case depending on the offense (the charge). If it is a minor case they are given a fine or community service. If it is a drug charge, assault charge or murder charges they are then placed on supervised probation. Each probation officer has a different way of approaching a probationer. For the probation officers' protection they go out with the police officers to do home visits once or twice a week to check on their probationers.

The police officers fill out paperwork when they make an arrest, and this is how a summons is created. This summons then is mailed to the defendant (person who gets arrested) with a date to appear in court. The police sometimes get summoned in to be a witness to the actual incident to tell their story to the judge.

By working in the courtroom I have learned how victims have rights. The restraining orders come out of Courtroom One, where I work every day. By seeing the process and the results this has helped me make better decisions with some personal

problems that I have had with my husband, even though it meant frightening choices for my son and I.

I was terrified when I had to go into court to order a restraining order on my husband. I needed the judge's signature to issue this order on him. I was so scared sitting in the audience waiting patiently for them to call my name. I was now on the other side facing difficulties like the victims that I see in the courtroom every day. I had to see all the people I work with, them wondering why I was here in the audience. I had very little support because I never talked to people I worked with about any of my problems. I was embarrassed by my situation.

I never thought a job could change so much in one person's life. I have grown from my experiences and learned many lessons the hard way but I made it through them. I decided I wanted to go back to school to work on my education, to get a degree in criminal justice. I am hoping to be a probation officer for juvenile court someday.

I have experienced a lot in life at the district court. It has helped me grow in so many ways. My son and I have an opportunity to grow and be ourselves for the first time in life. I would not be able to do any of this without these people in my life. I know I can change others' lives even if it's just to listen. This job has helped me to see life in so many different ways today. I know that I have choices to decide from and being able to see life clearer I think I can be a better person for my son and myself.

Sherry is 36 years old and lives in Haverhill, MA, with her 13-year-old son. Before she took Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing course in the fall of 2001, she says, "I never thought I could do this class." Now, she says that she "loves writing." Sherry is a criminal justice major here at NECC. In the future, she plans to work as a probation officer.

The Influence of Waltz in My Life
by Alexandra Godoy

Around the world there are many musical rhythms. Each culture has its own music, and it has a different beat depending on the customs of every country. In my country, Colombia, the Cumbia and Vallenato are the representative rhythms. Although during my life I grew up listening to Afro-American rhythms, the music that I like the most is the Viennese Waltz. This is a kind of classical music typical of Austria. I like this music because it uses a variety of instruments to make the melodies, it makes me feel relaxed, and it brings to my mind wonderful memories with my mother. As an adult I found that this music was the best for me particularly Andre Rieu's.

Viennese Waltzes use many instruments for their melodies. As a classical rhythm, it mixes a variety of wind, string, keyboard, and percussion instruments. Some of the percussion instruments include drums and cymbals. The piano is the only keyboard used in this kind of music because of its classical sound. Flutes, saxophones, clarinets, horns, and trombones are some of the wind instruments and finally between the string instruments we can find violins, which are my favorites, cellos, violas, and the bass. Those are only some of the musical instruments used for playing waltzes.

As I mentioned before, the violin is my favorite instrument because the sound that it makes when somebody plays it is very pleasant to my ears. For me the sound produced by this instrument is like water for a desert because it brings the earth new life and color. This music makes me feel full of life and energy. Every time that I hear violins I associate them with love because I think music played with this instrument is very romantic. I remember one day when my boyfriend invited me to have dinner. While we were eating a violinist arrived to our table and began to play beautiful melodies. Both of us, my boyfriend and me, enjoyed that moment. That night was very romantic. We enjoyed the dinner, the wine, the music, and I think that's one of the reasons why I think that violins are associated with love. I had the opportunity to work in a hotel in my country where every night they had a person playing the violin in the lobby to make the guests feel comfortable. When I finished my shift, I stayed in the lobby listening to the spectacular music that was played by that person.

Another reason why I like waltz music is that it allows me to forget the stress that I have had during the day. Music has a wonderful power setting our mood. I listen to waltz music to relax my body when I am tired. The tempo of waltzes sometimes is very slow while other times the three-quarter creates happy melodies. One slow waltz is "Austrian Swallows," and because of its rhythm, it allows me to relax my body and my mind after a busy day. When I hear that song I can feel peaceful and I forget the bad things that have happened during the day. It also helps me concentrate when I am doing

my homework because without lyrics I do not feel the necessity of singing with them. Waltzes with three-quarter rhythm are happy melodies. I listen to them when I'm feeling sad because they can change my mood easily. My favorite medley is "Straus and Company," which mixes eight songs that were originally played by J. Strauss II, E. Kalmanand, and F. Lehar. I loved the adaptation that was done by Andre Rieu who is my favorite violinist because he mixes the songs in a way that you don't feel the change of melodies and he makes of them very happy compositions.

Waltzes bring many good memories to my life. When I was young, waltzes were the music used by my mother during special dinners in our house. She taught me how to dance the waltz, and while she was doing this, she used to tell me fairy tales about princesses and princes that were dancing in palaces. She also told me about the wonderful clothes they wore. Since I was a child, I could imagine that I was one of those princesses dancing to that exquisite melody. Every year during the birthday of somebody in the house, my mother woke us up with music, which always was a waltz. I don't know if my sisters, my brother or my father felt the same things that I did, but for me it was the happiest moment during those special days.

My mother also used to listen to waltzes during evenings after finishing all the work that she had to do as a mother and a wife. When we ate dinner, we listened to waltz music and sometimes we danced before going to bed. I enjoyed those moments because we went to bed feeling happy and tired from dancing. Sometimes, we didn't feel the time passing by when we were dancing, and we went to bed very late. Nowadays, I understand why she listened to this kind of music because it made us feel happy and kept us close as a family during dinner.

When I grew up, I noticed that my inclination was to buy classical music. I had music of J. Straus, Shostakovich, Franz Lehar, and Rieu waltzes, and of them, my favorite artist is Andre Rieu. He grew up in a musical family. His father directed an orchestra and almost all his siblings play a musical instrument. Nowadays he has his own orchestra and it is wonderful to hear him playing with all his musicians. He always tries to involve his public so that marvelous music goes directly to their hearts. People in his concerts always end up dancing because for them it is impossible not to express all the energy that Rieu brings to their bodies with his music. A feeling of happiness fills my spirit and my body when I hear his music. That is the reason why I love waltzes played by Andre Rieu.

I thank my mother for giving me the opportunity of hearing this beautiful music when I was young and for allowing me to have dreams with princes and castles. Nowadays waltzes are part of my life. They make me feel happy, relaxed and they also make me remember wonderful moments during my childhood. Everybody should have the opportunity to hear this music and experience all the extraordinary feelings that I have every time that I hear these waltzes.

Alexandra (Alex) is 32 years old and a native of Colombia. She has been in America since July of 2001. In the spring of 2002, Alex took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course. Before taking Joanna's class, Alex thought "writing was a nightmare." Now that she has completed the course, she feels like she "can write a paper about any topic." Alex is a business management major at NECC.

The White Winged Dove
by Mary O'Brien

With music there is always a voice, or an image of someone who you think you would want to sound like, or be like. As a young girl of fourteen I dreamed of what life would be like if I could be Stevie Nicks. If I could just have her voice, or her style; wouldn't it just be perfect to be a rock goddess and have it all? I'm fairly certain now that it wasn't all glamour, but as a young girl the thought seemed to be surreal and inviting.

Stevie Nicks is one of my all time favorite female singers; she originally started out in the band Fleetwood Mac and ended up being the major reason for their success. Years later, after leaving the band to go her own way, her own solo career also quickly became a success. She has moved generations with her rhythmic melodies and inspiring poetic lyrics.

The image she portrays is one of mysticism. She reminds one of a beautiful blond gypsy dancer, or a ballerina twirling amongst scarves in her handkerchief skirt, keeping the beat with her tambourine. She reminds me of a white dove in flight. She always has a long shawl around her shoulders so that when she raises her arms it looks like she has wings, like a bird.

To me she is beautiful and enchanting, with her long, curly, golden hair. She has an angelical face that's creamy white, with big brown eyes and red lips. Her costumes are of vintage style, like a gypsy with her bohemian skirts and hippie gauze blouses, or the fairy queen look of light chiffon skirts and blouses adorned with antique lace and sparkling sequins. She wears high platform boots and adorns her head with either hats or lacey veils. She also wears beautiful elfin hooded velvet cloaks. She is a diva and she is cool!

As a young girl, even later into my twenties, I tried to dress up like her. I think that what influenced me the most, other than her voice, was her style. I almost always shopped with her look in mind. I wore long silk broom skirts, and hippie style blouses with tiny beads or sequins on them, and of course high musketeer boots. I lived in any high shoe. I had the long, layered, curly hair only my hair is black, and I loved to wear art deco jewelry with designs of moons and stars, or very unusual pieces that have a vintage look to them.

Stevie's voice is very distinctive, with its deep husky tones, which are smooth and full of sweet harmony. Her voice sets her apart from others. I can't recall any other singers that have a voice like hers. I love Nancy Wilson's voice from the band Heart; her voice is powerful and strong, but not deep like Stevie's. Other singers that have strong

voices are Pat Benatar and Debbie Harry (of the band Blondie) but none of them had the presence or depth Stevie Nicks has had.

The music she sings is classified as rock. Stevie plays the tambourine and piano in some of her tunes, while others in the band play guitar, synthesizers and a large emphasis is placed on the drums and bongos. The rhythm is a continuous intense moving beat, like in the song "Edge of Seventeen." It feels like you are running and running never stopping. It takes your breath away. The song is about someone dying, and the night bird coming to take their spirit away. "Well I went searching for an answer/Up the stairs and down the hall/But I did not find an answer/But I did hear the call/Of a nightbird singing/Come away come away/Well I hear you in the morning/And I hear you at nightfall/Sometimes to be near you/Is to be unable to hear you, my love/I'm a few years older than you are, my love/I hear the call of a nightbird." When listening to this song, it has such a moving beat it makes me want to get up and dance, which is best if I am all by myself because then I can really get into it without being distracted. I dim the lights, light candles and incense, and just get taken away. It relaxes me and moves me at the same time.

I love some of her sweeter slower songs like "Landslide," "Sara," and "Beauty and the Beast" and my favorite and perhaps her most popular, "Rhiannon." I am not totally sure what the song is about. It seems to be about a woman or a witch that cannot be tied down in any way. She also might have had two different personalities. The song starts off gentle and soft, very mystical, then it becomes very up lifting and you can feel it deep inside your soul. "Rhiannon rings like a bell through the night/And wouldn't you love to love her/She rules her life like a bird in flight/And who would be her lover/All your life you've never seen/A woman taken by the sky/Would you stay if she promised to you heaven/Would you even try…" Stevie's songs are wondrous; I just love listening to them. They lift me and move my spirit.

Fleetwood Mac's *Rumors* album was my very first album. It was given to me as a gift from my parents. They bought me my first stereo when I was fifteen years old in 1977. I played that album a million times. I still like it to this day and I've never really gotten tired of listening to it. I feel it was one of their best albums.

I had seen Stevie Nicks once with Fleetwood Mac. She had gone solo by then; it was in the early eighties. She played back and forth for a while with both bands. The night I saw them it was great. I especially remember her wardrobe; she had changed at least three times. One of her costumes was a long red handkerchief dress with a red hooded cloak, with long sleeves. She had off-white platform boots on. On stage they had wind blowing towards her. When she raised her arms she looked like she was in flight. Her performance was wonderful. After the show, which was at the Boston Garden, my husband and I hung around the parking lot partying and talking to another couple with us. (You could still do that then.) We had noticed three long, sleek, white limousines parked at a secluded entranceway and were wondering what type of people they could be waiting for, maybe the manager or some record business people or the like. Then to our surprise or rather, our shock, the whole band came walking through the two unmarked steel doors behind the limos with Stevie leading the pack. As the other band members began filling into their cars, Stevie and Christine MacVie (the other female vocalist, keyboardist and star in her own right) came right over and seemed thrilled to speak with us. They were very gracious and thankful for us, the audience, whom they

could perform for. I felt proud. She was like I imagined she should be. She was really down to earth. I was in awe at how elegant and enchanting she was in person. Stevie wore a long silvery white mink coat and high boots. Even off stage she looked the part. I was amazed; I was just so excited by being in her presence that I was speechless. I just stood there watching the others all asking for her autograph. She ended up signing only a few; mostly she kept talking and thanked us for our appreciation and said she was glad that she could be part of our happiness.

To me Stevie Nicks will always be an icon of grace and of beauty, style and strength. I'll always love her music; she puts her soul into what she writes. I'm forever thankful to her for the pleasure that I have received by listening to her, and also of course for her style. She's brought me much joy and comfort over the years in her lyrics and in her music. The white winged dove will continue to possess, inspire and enchant me for years to come.

Mary is 40 years old and lives in Bradford, MA. Before she took Ginger Hurajt's Basic Writing course in the spring of 2002, Mary says, "I was nervous." After she took Ginger's class, she says, "I feel I have learned a lot and I am better at writing." Currently, she is a computer applications major at NECC.

The Sound of Merengue
by Wendy Luzon

Whenever I hear the sound of merengue, I touch my past, I embrace my future and I accept and dance my present. I think life is like a good merengue. It needs to be well danced. I was born and raised surrounded by music. The rhythm of merengue was always part of all life events. When a new baby was born, a big celebration took place. The birthday parties, the weddings or any other activities could not take place without music. Even the political and social changes were celebrated by forming part of the lyrics of a song. We danced throughout difficult times. We celebrated life by dancing.

When I hear the drums (tambora), the guirra, and the accordion I get in touch with my ancestors and myself, especially when I hear a form of merengue, which is called perico ripiao. This kind of merengue is the typical one. It is basically the old form of merengue. It is well known for the people in the mountains or the rural areas of the island. The accordion is the instrument that makes the differences between the tipico and regular merengue. The guirra adds a very peculiar sound to the songs. The drums which we inherited from our ancestors from Africa create a defined rhythm. The sound of the drums gets into the body extending an invitation to dance. The saxophone is almost impossible to distinguish but adds a modern touch to it. All those instruments and the peculiar voice of the singer work together and create the sound of the typical merengue. The perico ripiao is full of rhythm and is faster than regular merengue. It has a very fast tempo. It will keep you dancing very fast. Before it ends, it will make you go up and down, around and around, in the same way life does to us.

The lyrics are always simple. The simplicity adds beauty to the song: "Dame agua de tu rio (Gives me water from your river)." The singer could obviously play with the lyrics. The line could be repeated back and forward, making sure the message gets across to the lover waiting for it. With simple words we celebrate commitments, the encounters of a new lover, or the sadness of leaving one. Anything we can think about could be the lyric for a good perico ripiao.

This type of music had also served as a voice for the people. Many historical events were recorded in song and dance. One event was the assassination of the

Dominican dictator named Leonidas Trujillo. When he was killed, an anonymous song came out announcing his death: "Mataron el Chivo (They kill the goat)." They celebrated freedom and justice with the lyrics of that song. After decades of oppression it was not safe to celebrate openly. Throughout this song the people found the way of expression.

The merengue works as a healer for us. It is medicine for the soul. When the suffering and injustice turns out to be overwhelming, dancing heals. By dancing together with family the future ahead is brighter and the present easier to face. It makes us remember the past by celebrating the present. All the things that we have now as a family or a country have been provided for us for very high cost. Other people's lives and freedom were the price paid for it. The celebration of the present begins when we remember the past.

Wendy is 29 years old and lives in Lawrence, MA, with her husband and her two children, Jaddiel and Amy. She was a student in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class during the summer of 2001. Now that she's completed the course, Wendy is more comfortable about writing, and says, "I can do it."

Learning How to Garden
by José M. Arias

For the last few years my hobby has been gardening. Every year in spring, I begin to get ready to do my garden. Everything started when my family and I first moved into this property in April of the year 1995. I have been living in this house for several years now and since the time we moved into this house, I have noticed that our neighbors across the street grow their own tomato garden. We are very good neighbors and friends; therefore, I asked them to tell me how to do my own tomato garden. They gave me some tips on how to plant my own tomato garden. The following are some of the steps I learned from my neighbors on how the tomato planting process starts.

The first thing has to be the preparation of the soil by using a pick, a shovel and a rake. When doing this work it is best to use gloves to protect your hands. To prepare the soil I have to remove the weeds and the small rocks from the surface of the soil, and then mix and soften the soil. This takes a few hours every day to do it. This step is very important to do because the soil has to be ready for the planting. After the soil is ready, it is best to dig small holes. These holes have to be dug out about one foot deep and two to three feet apart from each other. After the holes are ready for the planting, I usually water the soil for a few days before placing the plants in it.

The second step is to buy the tomato plants. I usually go to the Home Depot store because they have a variety of tomato plants from which to choose. These tomato plants have to be at least 6" tall for best results in the garden. To choose the right ones, you have to know what kind of tomatoes you would like to have in your garden because there are many varieties of tomato plants. If you are not sure about which tomato plants to buy for your garden, it is best to ask someone at the nursery to get some advice on which plants to buy.

Perhaps the best way to get a good tomato garden, if you don't have much experience with it, is to have directions from someone that knows a lot about tomato plants. If you go to Home Depot or any nursery, there is always someone at the store that can help you and give you advice on how to choose them and how to plant them. These people may also tell you that it is better to plant them early in the morning or in the evening.

The planting usually takes place at the end of April and at the beginning of May. It is best to be wearing gardening gloves and not to touch the plants during the planting because the warmth of your hands may damage the plant. When the planting time arrives and the weather is good, I begin to place the tomato plants in the soil, remembering to cover the roots enough to keep the plants standing straight. Two days after the plants have been planted into the soil, I start to put some fertilizer around the plants. This fertilizer is usually Miracle Grow for tomato plants. It is good to put some of this tomato food around the plants to get them to grow stronger and healthier.

After having fun planting your tomato plants, you have to get ready for the maintenance process. This process is important because you have to be very careful with the plants while watering or taking care of them. Growing a garden requires much attention. When the plants get bigger, it is good to place some stakes around them to stop them from falling to the ground. When they begin flowering, watering them requires special care because if too much water is put on top of the plants this may damage the

production itself. This information about how to plant and take care of a garden is in books or magazines for gardening; you can buy those magazines or books from the Home Depot warehouse store, or in any bookshop.

Always keep in mind that you can make your own tomato garden in your free time, and in your own backyard. You will learn so much about tomato gardens and on how to grow the best tomatoes. Knowing a lot about how to grow your own tomato garden is not really necessary because this process is not that difficult to perform. The only thing is that you have to dedicate many hours of work to it, and then wait to see the first tomato because it takes about a month to get the first harvest. After that you will enjoy a tomato feast from your own tomato garden every day.

José is 36 years old and is married with three children. He works as a school bus driver and enjoys sports and gardening. After taking Caroline Anderberg's Basic Writing course in the spring 2002 semester, he feels more capable of writing well.

A Roast Goat for Dinner
by Peter Kabingu

Goat meat is one of the most tasty meats you could eat among the many different types of meats. The reason why goat meat is so tasty and juicy could possibly be attributed to the way goats naturally live. If you go out there in the fields where goats are grazing and watch keenly of their grazing habits you'll realize that goats not only eat grass on the fields but also you'll see them climbing on to small trees and shrubs. They eat a lot of herbs and very many different types of plants which certainly is the reason why these many different nutrients from these plants contribute to their tasty and juicy meat.

Goat meat also appears to be very lean the reason being that goats seem to have a very active life due to their grazing habits. This lean meat therefore is very healthy to eat because it has very little fat in it.

For me to prepare a roast goat I go out there to the farm, possibly with some friends. We go directly to where they are grazing on the fields and the farmer allows me to choose what I want. Usually they are always grazing in large flocks on the fields and sometimes I have a hard time selecting what I want. I usually look for a young he goat and I can tell its age by looking at how long its beard is. I avoid choosing the she goats because the farmer certainly needs them for breeding. After selecting the goat the farmer gives the okay to catch it and that's when me and my friends go on a wild goat chase to catch it.

The farmer then brings the goat to his slaughter house where he kills it with one blow on the head. He would then go on to skinning it and consequently to take off the intestines and as a result he is left with the meat on the bones. Finally he cuts up the goat meat in big chunks like the legs, the ribs and the neck so that I can carry them home easily.

I later take the goat meat to my house and begin making the roast goat for dinner. I begin by gathering all the necessary equipment I need, for example, a sharp knife, a big oven pan, some foil paper for covering up the pan. I also gather all the ingredients I'll need for cooking the goat meat, for instance six ripe tomatoes, a big green pepper, one onion, some cilantro, eight potatoes, spinach and lastly enough salt to make my goat more tasty.

First I begin by cutting a bunch of ribs and a whole goat leg that I'm going to need for the goat roast dinner and put enough salt on them. I place them nicely on the big oven pan leaving out some space for putting my vegetables. I proceed by peeling the

onions then cutting them into small pieces. Then I clean the tomatoes and then cut them into small pieces. I then proceed to put both the onions and the tomatoes well spread out on the oven pan. Accordingly, I clean up the potatoes thoroughly then peel off the skin and put them inside the pan. I proceed by covering up the oven pan with a foil paper and then putting it inside the oven and turn on the oven temperature to 400 degrees. I let the meat cook for about an hour and a half. I finally wash the spinach and the cilantro plus the green pepper and then cut them up into small pieces. Lastly I put them well spread inside the pan to cook for the next 45 minutes.

The goat roast dinner is certainly ready after I check on it one last time when I cut a piece of it and taste it just to make sure. I also have to make sure the potatoes are cooked by poking them with a fork spoon and when the potato breaks I am sure everything is cooked.

Usually the meat is always very tender after cooking and also because the goat was not also old. I proceed by taking my cooked goat to the dinner table. Inside the pan there is all this cooked goat with the vegetables plus a lot of gravy, which builds up when the meat is cooking. The aroma which comes out of the pan smells so good because of the cilantro which also enhances the taste. Lastly I cut the meat with a sharp knife holding the meat with a big fork spoon beginning with the ribs and severing it. I proceed to serve the rest of the leg meat with the vegetables then the gravy from the pan. This goat dinner I guarantee you tastes so good and the meat is so tender. It's one of my favorite meals I like to make.

This dinner is very easy to make and you certainly get all the food groups you should eat. You also get a very tasty dinner.

Peter is 29 years old, works as a nursing assistant, and enjoys basketball and football. His major at NECC is Licensed Practical Nursing. Peter has enjoyed Carol Barron's spring 2002 Basic Writing course because of the opportunity to express himself and his ideas.

A Lesson in Becoming a Freak
by Laura Marie Cannata

Are you sick of the boring life you live? Do you feel like you need a change in your life? Well, if you can say yes to these two questions, I think it is time for you to become a freak. The only thing you need to do is follow these steps and you're on your way to a new and better life within two days or even a few hours.

First, if you are sitting down reading this that means you want a change, so what I need you to do is run to your bedroom A.S.A.P. and grab a trash bag, maybe two. Now that you're in there take and throw away all your dorkie things like the bunny tee Grandma and Grandpa got you for Christmas last year, or those blue jeans you have had since like 1989. That's right! They all go inside of the trash. Things that you should keep are black and pink, and most of all red. You may keep your bellbottoms if you like just in case you change your mind later in life. If you're still having a hard time figuring out what is good to keep and bad, you can go to the local high school and talk to someone you think might be a freak and that would be someone with dyed hair or with a lot of piercings.

After you're done that step, it is now time to get you on the way to becoming a freak. Get in your car A.S.A.P. and drive to the local mall. There is no time to stop and talk to the friends. You're on a mission to find the Hot Topic. If you don't know where it is because you have not been there before then it might be a good idea to ask someone.

When you get in there you will find everything that is needed to help you out. The first thing you need to do is look for the hair dye. I would go with the purple or the teal. You can match more things you buy with teal than purple. If you're more of a green or blue person then go with one of those colors. Make sure you don't forget the kit to bleach your hair. If you don't use bleach in your hair, then whatever color you pick to do, your hair will not take. After you come that far, you are ready to pick out a few things to wear.

For the ladies you're going to need to get anything tight and leather. If you're not a big leather fan, you can go with the gothic look and that is a long dress with lace. As long as everything you buy matches then you should be all set. For the men, you can get really anything in the store and it will look good on you, but for now I would go with the leather or the gothic look also; it is easier to work around in a short time. If you're having trouble then ask the people that work at Hot Topic. They might look like freaks but they are not going to hurt you.

You're almost done at the store. Don't worry. You need to go to the wall where they keep all of their cute things to wear in your hair or on your body. Hello Kitty is a cute thing or even anything that is shiny and colorful. For the men I know you're not really into that. You should maybe go with a tie from Hot Topic or maybe a pair of their shoes.

Now for the next step for 18 year olds and older only. On the way home from your trip to Hot Topic, I need you to stop at a tattoo place so you can get a tattoo or a piercing. I think that freaks look good with their nose or eyebrows done. As soon as you

get done there, get home as fast as you can. I am giving you four more hours to have this under way.

Take and rip open the things to dye your hair and follow the steps to make sure you don't mess up. After you're done with your hair, you need to get dressed in your new things. Once you are done with these steps, you are almost done with the process of becoming a freak.

Now it is time to work on the way you act and what you listen to on the radio or on CD. That is right–no more Backstreet Boys or Mandy Moore. It is time for the big things like Korn and I.C.P. Get the entire rap and pop music you have, throw it all out, and get new music.

I hope you enjoyed the steps to becoming a freak. Your day can change overnight or within a few hours, but remember that you can always go back to the way you were and no one is stopping you from becoming anything you want to be.

Laura is 20 years old and lives in Haverhill, MA. She hopes to become a teacher. Since taking Jackie Peña's Basic Writing class in spring 2002, she writes, "I look at writing in a new way. I can express myself more."

Becoming an Entrepreneur
by Bobby Hodges

Becoming an entrepreneur is one of the hardest things that I've had to do in my life. It's not like working for someone else where the structure of the business is already established and you are hired to perform one particular function within that structure. When you start up a business from the bottom, everything is your responsibility. You are taking a chance, a big chance, a chance that can make you or break you. It usually takes all of your life savings and loans to get started, so that also increases the pressure. The odds are against you. There are so many obstacles in your way that can cause you to fail.

These are hard times, times that test every part of you as a human being – mentally, physically, and spiritually. When you work in your business, your paycheck comes last to everything else. Accomplishments are your early gains. All you have to keep you going strong is your belief in yourself and your ambition. You have made a decision and invested everything you have in that decision for better or worse, so it is imperative that you do whatever it takes to make your business a success.

There are two major considerations before you decide to start your own business. First, you must always deal with your competitors, most of who already have a head start on you. What will separate you from others is how well you do your job, along with having a good attitude and a friendly personality. This is accomplished by taking pride in what you do, with an understanding that each job has your signature attached to it. Leaving a good impression of yourself with your customer is one of the most important things you can do. A satisfied customer is the best advertisement you can get, and the price tag is right – it's free.

Second, you have to deal with a complex financial situation. You must figure out how to make ends meet. This may require spending time physically running the business, while also putting in some working hours elsewhere. Equally important is having sufficient cash flow, which involves customers paying on time as well as keeping control of your overhead costs and expenses. You must also be willing to work very hard for very little money until the business has been built up to a point where you are making a profit. There is no certain time frame for when this may occur.

After you have given these obstacles careful consideration, the first task is planning your business. You have to decide on what kind of business you want to develop and who will be your potential customers. You also have to determine your preparation for entering into this market. For example, in 1984 when I started a business with two partners, we decided on having a cleaning and painting service that we would market to large corporations and industries. We also decided that the other aspect of the business would be painting houses, both interior and exterior. In these two areas, the three of us had an abundance of experience and skills, since we had all worked for many years doing these sorts of jobs for other contractors.

After deciding on the nature of our business venture, it was then time for us to map out a business plan. In this plan, we had to determine what materials would be needed, and the amount of money it would take to keep the business afloat for the first 18 months. Next, we had to meet with our accountant, who we all had agreed upon to handle the financial part of the business. Once this step was completed we had to visit a number of loan institutions to try and secure the capital we needed to get the business off

the ground. We met with loan officers at the Small Business Bureau and other banks where each of us individually had already established good financial relationships. The fact that we were a three-person partnership, as opposed to a solo ownership, made securing a loan somewhat easier.

After applying for a loan, the next step in the process is waiting for approval from the bank. Now the mind has a chance to just think and reflect on all of the events that have occurred over the last few weeks. You nervously think about the possibilities, good and bad, and you also second-guess yourself. In addition, you now have the time to daydream about working for yourself, being successful, and building your life the way that you want it to be.

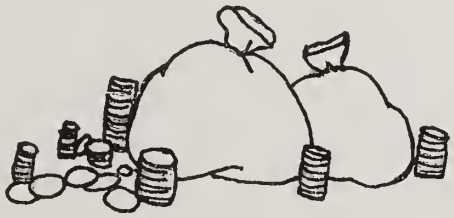
Then one day there's a telephone call telling you that everything has been approved. An appointment must be set up with the bank for signing and finalizing the loan. There's the celebration with family and friends where well wishes and prayers are bestowed upon you, along with a final salute and toast to succeed. While celebrating, some of the tension that has grown within you during the waiting period begins to leave as you realize that it has finally happened -- you have finally become the entrepreneur you dreamed about for so long. You have come through a slow and intense process to get to this point. Moreover, you have struggled and sacrificed for so long that it's hard to believe that it's all real. You need to take time to absorb what has happened, and to prepare yourself for what is to come.

There are two sides of being an entrepreneur. On one hand there is the challenge of being solely responsible for the success of the business, while on the other hand there is the joy of being on your own. To meet the challenge, you must do everything in your power to make it work. You arise before everyone else in the household, and you return long after everyone has retired and is soundly sleeping. As you tiptoe around in the thick silence, you discover a wrapped meal in the refrigerator that needs to be warmed up. Also to your surprise, there's a short note propped against the centerpiece on the table telling you how much you are loved and missed, and indicating that the meal is there where you found it. You must get used to not seeing faces of loved ones and friends as often as you may like to. Because of the long, never-ending days, you barely see them. And, even when you do, you are probably too tired to participate in any planned activities.

There are other faces that you must learn to accept not seeing, those of clocks and watches. Time is no longer the gatekeeper of life. For instance, many times my partners and I would begin working on a job, and have no idea how many hours it would take to complete it. We often worked well into the night so that the customer would be pleased with the progress that we were making. This is the life that the entrepreneur must become accustomed to.

The joy of being your own boss can never be measured in dollars and cents. When you offer someone a service, and you deliver it to the best of your ability, then there's this feeling that comes over you of complete fulfillment. This feeling is so precious that it makes it okay to get up early and be gone until the wee hours of the night. It makes it okay for you to be exhausted and to have made all of the sacrifices necessary to get the job done. The highest point is when you see the expression upon a customer's face once the job has been completed. They give you compliments on a job well done, and you have the pleasure of knowing that your best has been more than good enough.

These experiences are priceless, and memories remain long after the money has been spent. You also have the sensational feeling of starting something from scratch, and building it into a successful enterprise. The long hours, the sacrifices, the hardships to reach this goal, and the many times that you were in doubt about whether you had made the right decision are all behind you now. All the times you spent wondering how your good intentions could bring about so many bad things and so much suffering are forgotten. As you stand committed and determined, you realize that the journey between A and Z is unpredictable, that life itself is a challenge, and if you are to survive, there will be many peaks and valleys that you will have to endure in the future. But standing at this point in time, you realize that finally things are working well for you. You have grown your business to a level where you can make a good living from it, and your soul has been enriched with the spirits of the many wonderful people you have met along the way. You have now become a successful entrepreneur.



Bobby, 57, lives in North Andover, MA, and is a business management major at NECC. He says that, before taking Carol Barron's Basic Writing class in spring 2002, he felt okay about his writing, but now he feels great.

Magazines Give Young People the Wrong Idea
by Danielle O'Brien

It makes me angry that magazines never show full figured women in them. The only ones that do are special ones for plus size women, such as Mode or BBW. BBW stands for Big Beautiful Women. It is almost as if our society is ashamed of plus size women, and wants to hide them from the world. But on other magazines such as Seventeen or Cosmopolitan, you see very skinny almost emaciated looking women in them. Hey not all women look like human skeletons!

Women come in all different shapes and sizes, and we should rejoice in that fact! We should stop sending out this message, that the only way you can be happy is if you are thin. Lots of younger girls buy magazines, such as *Seventeen* or *Teen*. On the covers you can find headlines about losing weight; for example, on the cover of *Seventeen* June 1999 issue there is a headline, which reads, "Back to school body guide." Or on the June 2000 issue of *Marie Claire*, it says, "Burn Fat Faster." Also on another magazine, *Glamour* June 2000 issue it says, "Cellulite Erasers? We test the Best Blubber Blaster!" Why does every magazine tell you to change your body image? What type of message are we sending young girls? Young girls are very impressionable, and after looking at these, they will most likely become obsessed with their body image.

I have gone into stores in search of a good magazine to read, and find really thin girls staring back at me. Looking at those magazines makes me feel a little sad, but I shrug it off because I know that I will never be a thin stick of a girl. So I choose magazines like *Mode* to read with women who look like me. However, this does not stop my anger towards the fact that most magazines show really thin people in them.

I had this friend in high school who was really pretty, smart and funny. She had a great body with curves in all the right places. I was envious of her because I was chubby. She, however, thought she was fat, and would compare herself to the girls in the magazines. She would try all of these crazy diet ideas she found in them. Eventually her obsession with her weight caused her to become bulimic. It got so out of control that she had to leave school. This angered me because she took what was in those magazines as truth. She let those magazines tell her what her body image should be, which then led her to self-destruction.

I feel it is our job as a society to start having real women in magazines. For example, thin, fat, short or tall, that way all types of women will feel that they can accept themselves, and be happy the way they are. We could start this by giving health tips in magazines about how to live an active life style, instead of putting emphasis on being thin. The magazines should explain that you do not have to be thin to be healthy. The magazines should put in stories about people dealing with weight issues and how to help them. Until we do these young girls will get the wrong impression from magazines.

Danielle is 20 years old and lives in Bradford, MA. She was a student in Margaret Bergeron's Basic Writing class in the fall of 2001. Before taking Margaret's class, Danielle was "a little shaky" about writing, but now that she's completed the course, she feels "a lot better." When she is not doing her schoolwork, Danielle spends her time reading, drawing or going to the beach.

Clothing
by Ana Herrera Lake

It makes me sad that people let such an unimportant thing as clothing influence the way they judge another person. I believe that clothing has too big of an influence on the way people treat you and even respect you. What you wear affects your life because people believe that clothing says a lot about who you are and what you are capable of.

People are treated differently based on what they wear. If you wear all black clothes and make-up you are either a freak or a very depressed person and therefore you are off limits to befriend. If you wear baggy clothes then you must sell drugs or be in a gang. These people are considered to have a very bad influence on their peers and therefore parents don't usually let you hang out with someone who wears these types of clothing. If you show too much skin then you must be either very confident or very bitchy. People will make fun of you or consider you a slut if you hang out with them because you must be like them to want to hang out with them. All these judgments are generally wrong because clothing only expresses your sense of style not who you are as a person.

Most men in particular like to categorize women based on what they wear. They will literally let what the women usually wear influence them when it comes to considering them for a date. For example, women that wear lots of tight and revealing clothes are considered to be outgoing and easy (meaning a girl who is up for a one-night stand). These women are considered to have no morals and will date many men. On the other hand a girl that doesn't wear tight and revealing clothes is considered to be boring and a geek. These types of women are considered to have very little experience in the dating department. They are either innocent or undercover sluts. These assumptions are not accurate because you could wear revealing clothes and still not be a slut. Is it what you do that classifies you as a slut? I've seen cases where the girl that wears all the unrevealing clothes is the actual slut instead of the one that wears all the revealing clothes. Your morals are inside and they are not revealed by what you wear. It is by how you act that they get revealed. Unfortunately men will go for the girls that wear the revealing clothes with the nice body. Some men don't look beyond looks.

One of the most ridiculous things I've ever seen clothing influence on is intelligence. What you wear has nothing to do with what you are capable of. I hate when people say that if you look smart then you must be smart. I remember when I was back in high school there was a kid named Michael who was always joking around and always wore baggy clothes to school. Everyone considered him to be very irresponsible and somewhat unintelligent. One day we had to do a project and the teacher said that he was going to give each of us a partner. I coincidentally ended up with Michael. Everyone was telling me that he wasn't going to be much help and that I was going to be stuck doing all the work.

All my friends were wrong. Michael was really helpful and he was the one that came up with most of the ideas for the project. He even did most of the talking in the oral presentation. Everyone was amazed and we had one of the highest grades of the

class. My friends were telling me that it was impossible that he did all the work. They said that he didn't look smart enough to have done all that work. I told them that he basically did the whole project himself and came up with most of the ideas. This guy demonstrated that his ability to work had nothing to do with the way he dresses. He taught me and everyone else a lesson and from that day on clothing was nothing more than an item to me. I am not so sure that everyone else learned the lesson.

It sickens me every time I hear someone judge someone else based on what they have on. I don't think that clothing has anything to do with who you are. I suggest that people don't let this ignorance affect their way of life. If you like dressing a certain way then you must continue to dress that way. Don't change to gain people's sympathy. If they don't like the way you dress they will most likely not like the way you are.

Ana is 19 years old and lives in Lawrence, MA, with her mother, brother, grandmother and cousins. Before taking Lynne Nadeau's Basic Writing course in the spring of 2002, Ana says, "I was not very confident with my writing skills." Now that she has completed Lynne's course, she says, "I have more confidence in my writing." She plans to enter the paralegal program at NECC.

Tax Dollars
by Dulce Lora

I would rather that my tax dollars were spent on education than on the support of single mothers. Tax dollars come from the efforts of people like me that care about getting an education or training in order to get a job to live by. Supporting single mothers and their kids does not solve the overpopulation problem. In some ways we make this problem worse because they do not care if they have five or ten kids, knowing that they won't have to worry about getting the money to feed them.

First, without doubt, I can say that most of the kids that are raised under the welfare system do not get the right nutrition. In many cases the money that is supposed to be spent on their food covers their mother's personal necessities. For example, I will never forget seeing a former neighbor exchanging her food stamps for compact discs in a grocery store. In other cases I heard about mothers selling the food stamps for a lower price than the real, just to spend the money on something else. In some cases the money is spent in a discotheque or on expensive clothes.

Also I would really prefer that my tax dollars were spent on education instead of supporting single mothers because even their children would benefit in the future. If this money were saved for scholarships many young people would be able to go to college. Right now many youngsters cannot continue their studies in college because the credits are too expensive. In many cases middle class families cannot afford a career for their kids.

By supporting single mothers and their kids we contribute to reducing the whole family into parasites of the society. Getting a check from the government every month gets them used to not making any effort to improve their lives. In most of the cases this bad habit goes from generation to generation as a heritage. Most of the single mothers on welfare do not go to school and do not care about finding a job. Therefore, their kids do not have a good example to follow.

Finally, I can say that the benefits of supporting single mothers are none. Instead of helping them to raise a good family, we encourage their lack of responsibility. Most of the time they have many kids and from different fathers too. In many cases they lie when they say that they do not know where the fathers are, just to avoid that they get charged of child support. On the contrary, the truth in most of the cases is that the fathers live

with them or if not they have a sexual relation with the mothers but they do not pay for any bill or food.

I think the government should not be supporting single mothers unless they are out of work because they were laid off and at that moment they were not able to get another job. We should not be supporting them just because they do not want to work. I suggest as a solution to this problem to immediately stop all public assistance to single mothers and to establish a screening process that certainly finds as eligible those individuals that can prove that they really need the support. Instead of giving the mothers the money, I would suggest that the government check which are the real necessities of their kids and spend the money on programs that enrich their education.

Dulce is 42 years old and lives in Lawrence, MA, with her husband and three sons. Before she took Lynne Nadeau's Basic Writing course in the spring of 2002, Dulce says, "I felt that I was not able to write well." After taking Lynne's class, Dulce feels much better about her writing. She says, "Now, I feel proud of myself."